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ABSTRACT

For most of the 20th century, Roman Jakobson's name will have been synonymous with the definition of communication as a human science, i.e., communicology. Jakobson is the modern source of most of what communication scholars theorize about and practice as human communication, and he will be the source of how communication scholars shall come to understand communication in the future as the theoretical and applied use of semiotic principles of epistemology. Roman Jakobson alone offers a theory of communication (derived from Jakobson's immediate correction in 1950, on linguistic and semiotic grounds, of an ill-fated information theory) grounded in the study of human language as Aristotle's trivium of an integrated practice of thought, speech, and inscription, i.e., logic, rhetoric, and grammar, all of which are explicated by a semiotic understanding of what it means to be human. Analysis of Jakobson's model of communication indicates that it is inherently semiotic in origin, rather than linguistic as he himself believed. (A figure representing aspects of communication theory and information theory is attached.) (RS)

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Roman Jakobson's Semiotic Theory of Communication

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For most of this century, Roman Jakobson's name will have been synonymous with the definition of communication as a human science, i.e., communicology. I use the future perfect tense, will have been synonymous, because Jakobson is indeed the modern source of most of what we theorize and practice as human communication. And yet, he will be the source of how we shall come to understand communication in the future as the theoretical and applied use of semiotic principles of epistemology. In short, *what* we know about communication and *how* we shall understand it in years to come is the accomplishment of Roman Jakobson.

By way of illustrating my principal thesis, I shall be arguing two points. First, Roman Jakobson alone gives us a theory of communication grounded in the study of human language as Aristotle's trivium of an integrated practice of thought, speech, and inscription, i.e., logic, rhetoric, and grammar, all of which are explicated by a semiotic understanding of what it means to be human. Note that I mean theory in the serious sense of science, i.e., a complete, comprehensive, and corrigible account of human conduct that begins without methodological constraints. This is to say, Jakobson does not offer us some model whose limitations are exceeded only by a lack of applicability to human conduct--the type of model that can be found in any textbook in the discipline. So in my first argument, I shall be talking about Jakobson's immediate correction in 1950, on linguistic and semiotic grounds, of the ill fated model of "information theory" suggested by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver in 1949. Second, I shall advance the argument that Jakobson's theory of communication is inherently semiotic in origin, rather than linguistic as he himself believed. This argument will be a presentation of the key features of Jakobson's model of the theory of communication.

Aspects of Communication Theory and Information Theory

In the process of human communication, Jakobson (1971, II: 703) says, "we

must consistently take into account the decisive difference between *communication* which implies a real or alleged addresser and *information* whose source cannot be viewed as an addresser by the interpreter of the indications obtained." In short, Jakobson (1971, II: 573) argues that we cannot ignore "a clear-cut line of demarcation between the theory of communication and of information."

Jakobson's point can be summarized and illustrated with a simple comparison of the key features of both communication and information as (1) an account of human ***choice*** (an eidetic capacity to judge appearances) and (2) an account of human ***practice*** (an empirical capacity to judge appearances). Obviously, the ability to choose is a theoretical capacity, while that of practice is an applied capacity. I use the term ***capacity*** here in C. S. Peirce's sense of semiotics, i.e., the human recognition of sign function embodied in a symbol (Lanigan 1988).

The symbolic capacity for a human being is precisely the conjunction of choice and practice in which "something stands for something else" (aliquid stat pro aliquo), as Jakobson (1971, II: 703) cites Peirce. The symbolic capacity of human beings is (1) **[see handout]** a constitution of intentionality in communication theory; description and depiction are the discovery of meaning (hypothesis or abduction). By contrast within information theory, the symbolic merely reconstitutes intentionality so that one can only regressively cause and predict by invention what one already assumes to be true (hypostatization or deduction). The symbolic capacity of humans is (2) a consciousness-of-experience in which an understanding judgment (conduct) constitutes meaning as communication. Whereas (3) in information theory, the reverse condition of the experience-of- consciousness constitutes an understanding of behavior as action. Action reduces uncertainty, but the signification of the action is an arbitrary meaning. For communication purposes, the symbolic is (4) a choice of context in which metaphor (a shift of substance and whole) creates Jakobson's famous *distinctive features*. As he notes (1971, II: 574), "the constituents of the code, for instance, the distinctive features, literally occur and really function in speech

communication." Simply put, a distinctive feature is (5) the eidetic recognition of an analogue logic of "both/and" in which opposition (distinction) is discovered by inclusive combination (feature); recall the definition of a sign, something that stands for something else. The parallel function for information theory is the symbolic as a context of choice where metonymy (a shift of substance and attribute) creates Jakobson's (1971, II: 571) famous redefinition of *redundancy features*. Again simply put, redundancy features are an empirical recognition of a digital logic of "either/or" in which opposition (feature) is invented by exclusive disjunction (redundancy as rule; induction).

The comparison of distinctive and redundancy features allows Jakobson to make theoretical claims for communication as a science. The distinctive feature theorem is (6) a necessary condition of motivation logic according to Peirce's notion of hypothesis or abduction formulated as the proposition [Rule + Result = Case]. Likewise, information theory requires a sufficient condition of causality wherein [communication theory entails information theory]. Several summary conclusions can now be drawn by Jakobson: (7) communication as a choice and practice of human conduct is a judgment by theory definition on the model of a rhetoric of tropes (metaphor and metonymy), while information is a judgment by method rule on the model hypostatization (invention and operation); (8) communication is inherently linguistic and then semiotic as a symbolic structure or relation (both/and function), while information is inherently mathematical and then semiotic as symbolic form or correlation (either/or function); that is, (9) communication is a code phenomenon, while information is a message phenomenon as (10) Jakobson corrects Shannon and Weaver.

Jakobson's Communication Model: Semiotic Language

Within the context of Jakobson's "human sciences model" **[handout]**, there is

a disciplinary hierarchy moving from linguistics as the study of verbal (i.e., oral) messages, on to semiotics as any type of message, but with the verbal implied, and next, on to the study of any messages as the structural scope of social anthropology and economics, then finally to any form of life as a message exchange system in biology. Indeed, these are the parameters of a theory, the only theory of communication that deserves the name "theory" rather than model. The information model hardly compares on this accurate theory scale!

While Jakobson as a linguist naturally believed in the linguistic sign as the starting place for analyzing the phenomenological nature and function of discourse, his own researches convince us that a semiotic language is the origin of a theory of communication. The proof lies with his own priority for distinctive features as an *eidetic* phenomenon of realization, i.e., a combinatory inclusion (the distinctive both/and **choice**), prior to the actualization of a phenomenon as *empirical* (the redundancy of either/or **practice**). Simply put, the code as semiotic is prior to the message as linguistic. Recall Jakobson;s demarcation of communication and information: "we must consistently take into account the decisive difference between *communication* which implies a real or alleged addresser and *information* whose source cannot be viewed as an addresser by the interpreter of the indications obtained." Only a code (semiotic) grounds the eidetic combination of "addresser" (speaker) and "interpreter" (thinker) as linked by an empirical message (linguistic). The reverse case, where the empirically linguistic is primary is, indeed, information. No code is available for interpretation because the empirical interpreter as addressee cannot simultaneously view him or herself as an other addresser. Simply put, the addresser **both** chooses a code (for a message) so that contact (for a context) exists with an addressee **and** the addresser practices the idea of a code by being the first interpreter of what is said orally. The emotive function of the addresser is in fact an eidetic display of distinctive (code) features (message) as primary modeling so that, in turn, messages may be coded. Communication is, thus, what Jakobson refers to as an

"overlapping" reference where the addresser and addressee are embodied in one human being as perceiver/expresser prior to interpersonal interpretation.

On the other hand, information is a condition of referential "circularity" in which messages refer to messages and codes refer only to codes. This is the state of the addressee. By inclusive combination, the conative function of the addressee is, in fact, an empirical display of redundancy (message is message) features (code is code) as secondary modeling. This is to say, the addressee must work from the empirical message manifest as language (speech; logos) back to the eidetic code manifest in speech (thought; mythos). Unless the listener hears the sounds, the place of the linguistic among the other semiotic codes cannot be determined. An interpersonal communication proof from everyday life will suffice here. We all get written telephone call memo notes; we did not hear the caller, so we cannot function as interpreters, which means we are not addressees. The behavioral result, we do not call back; because the message was not part of our conduct of code recognition.

While I do not intend to review all of the elements and functions in Jakobson's communication model, I do wish to look at two because they are at the heart of understanding communication in a proper context devoid of lingering positivistic notions of information; and, because they are so badly misconstrued by casual readers of Jakobson. These two functions are the metalinguistic function of the code element and the poetic function of the message element.

First, let me discuss the metalinguistic function of the code. Any code operates as symbolic. It is a semiotic function in which one message stands for another. Simple enough, but badly misunderstood when the message per se is symbolic as is the case in language. Simplistic behaviorism is of absolutely no use here because we are in the human world of the symbolic where actions mean, not simply are. Any message is a sign consisting of two parts: an expression part known as the *signifier* and a perception part known as the *signified*. When you have two messages or two people

viewing a shared message, then you have a distinctive signifier/signified compared with another redundant signifier/signified. The metalinguistic function is an interpretive, rhetorical act in which one signifier is compared with the other signifier (the metalanguage; linguistic referent), and one signified with the other signified (the object language; extra-linguistic referent) illustrated by your answer to the question I now orally utter: Are you listening to English?

Your ability to answer this question will depend on the poetic function of the message, the second semiotic function with which I am concerned. The word "poetic" for Jakobson is not an adjective for the noun "poetry". Rather for Jakobson as for Aristotle, poetic is the counterpart of rhetoric. The poetic function of a message is its double articulation of both choice and practice. A message announces a choice of meaning, i.e., a paradigmatic selection of a word that we recognize as *distinctive* because it is similar to other words in its category (linguistic referent), but as a metaphor it can jump categories (extra-linguistic referent) and, thereby, substitute meanings. And yet, the message announces a practice of meaning, a syntagmatic combination of the same word that we recognize as *redundant* because it is contiguous to other categories of words (linguistic referent) which provide a metonymical contexture of meanings, where attributes of one category suggest the substance of other categories (extra-linguistic referent). In short, the poetic function is a ***reversibility and reflexivity*** of two different dimensions of consciousness and experience: (1) while one is present, the other is absent; (2) while one functions as a code, the other is simultaneously the message; and (3) as one operates to make meaning static and stable, the other works to make the meaning dynamic and developmental. The poetic *function* (Hjelmslev's sense) is an embodiment of logic as a functive (distinctive; extra-linguistic) and of rhetoric as a functive (redundant; linguistic).

Let me close by citing a summary quotation which specifies the *essential* (phenomenological) *proposition* (semiotic) from Roman Jakobson's famous article

entitled "Verbal Communication" which appeared in the September 1972 (p. 43; my emphasis) issue of *The Scientific American:*

"The cardinal property of language noted by the initiator of semiotics, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), namely the **translatability of any verbal sign into another, more explicit one,** renders an effective service to communication in that it counteracts ambiguities caused by lexical and grammatical homonymy or by the overlapping of elliptic forms." That is, "the two-way transformations that make it possible to determine the state of the outputs from the inputs and vice versa are an essential prerequisite for all genuine intercommunication."

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Aspects of Communication Theory & Information Theory

Theoretical Proposition: Communication Theory entails Information Theory

Logic Rule: {Both [Both/And] And [Either/Or]}

Theory Rule: Abduction; Adduction: {Rule + Result = Case}

Communication Theory - - - >	Information Theory
1. Def: Constitution of Intentionality	1. [re-constitutes intentionality]
2. Consciousness-of-Experience (Meaning: understanding judgment) **{Rule}**	2. Experience-of-Consciousness (Action: understanding behavior) **{Result}**
3. [construction of certainty]	3. Def: Reduction of Uncertainty
4. Choice of Context (Metaphor) {Eidetic: [Jakobson's] **"Distinctive Feature"**}	4. Context of Choice (Metonymy) {Empirical: [Jabobson's] **"Redundancy Feature"**}
5. Analogue Logic (Both/And)	5. Digital Logic (Either/Or)
6. Necessary Condition as Hypothesis [Motivation]	6. Sufficient Condition as Hypostatization [Causality]
7. Judgment by Theory Definition [Genus -> Differentia] (tropic logic = rhetoric) **{Result}**	7. Judgment by Method Rule [Genus -> Definiendum] ("operational definition" sic) **{Rule}**
8. Linguistic Theory [Structure]	8. Mathematical Theory [Form]
9. Key Concept: Code **{Case}**	9. Key Concept: Message **{Case}**
10. Author: Roman Jakobson (1950)	10. Authors: Claude E. Shannon & Warren Weaver (1949)

Sources:

(1) Richard L. Lanigan, *Phenomenology of Communication* (Duquesne UP, 1988), esp. Ch. 14.
(2) Richard L. Lanigan, *The Human Science of Communicology* (Duquesne UP, 1991).
(3) Anthony Wilden, *The Rules Are No Game: The Strategy of Communication* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), esp. Postscript.
(4) Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* (2nd Ed.; Tavistock, 1980).